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The Russian Orthodox Church and the KGB:

The History of "Adulterous Cohabitation"

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Can a good tree bear evil fruit, and a bad tree bear good fruit? (Matt. 7:18). With reference to these words from the Gospel of Matthew, we would like to begin the discussion about the current state of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP).

There is an opinion that the current problems in the ROC MP are connected exclusively with the personality of its patriarch Kirill Gundyaev, and that if he were gone, everything in the Moscow Patriarchate could change for the better. However, is this really the case? Are the problems of the whole system really concentrated in one man?

It is obvious to everyone that the ROC MP is experiencing a deep crisis. But what are its essence and causes? The success of the treatment of any disease, first, depends on the correctness of the diagnosis. And this requires delving into the history of the disease. Otherwise, we will neither be able to arrive at the correct diagnosis nor begin effective treatment. It is pointless to treat the consequences of the disease if we do not treat its causes.

This task raises another question for us: can the modern structure of the Moscow Patriarchate be considered the legal successor of the centuries-old Russian Church? Such a question inevitably refers us to the ecclesiastical disputes and discussions of the Orthodox episcopate and clergy in the USSR in the late 1920s-1930s. That discussion was not finalized in a natural way. It was artificially suppressed by the Soviet punitive organs by means of brutal repression and physical annihilation of the Church opposition. Since there has been no final word on this matter, it remains relevant, including in the context of contemporary events.

Sergianism: from an illegal church coup to "common joys" with the totalitarian regime

Undoubtedly, the most important event in the life of the Orthodox Russian Church in the twentieth century was the Local Council of 1917-1918. With the democratic transformations that began in the country in February 1917, the Orthodox Church, which for two hundred years had been deprived of canonical church government and conciliar organization, received for the first time the right to convene an all-church Local Council. After centuries of being under the pressure of the imperial system, where the Church was deprived of internal freedom and was assigned only the role of a state appendage or a certain "spiritual department", there was hope for its transformation and free development. The Council laid the foundation for serious reforms of church life on the

Members of the Moscow Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, 1917.

principles of democratization and inner spiritual freedom. But its initiatives and decisions were never realized due to the destructive intervention of the Bolsheviks, who soon seized power in the country and unleashed unprecedented persecution against any manifestation of dissent and religiosity.

The goal of the Communist regime was the total violent eradication of religion, belief in God, any churches, and their ministers. However, this met with serious resistance from the population of believers. Realizing that it was impossible to completely eradicate religion from the people, the Soviet repressive bodies (VChK-OGPU-NKVD)[1] made attempts to put the Church in the USSR in the service of their own interests. In parallel with arrests and shootings of "unreliable" bishops and priests, the Soviet punitive bodies instigated a number of schisms within the Church, and also undertook the recruitment of individual hierarchs and clergymen as secret agents. Thus, in the 1920s, the Renovationism (*obnovlenchestvo*)[2] and several other schisms emerged within the Russian Orthodox Church.

In the maelstrom of tragic events of the 1920s-1930s, one of the most serious challenges to the Russian Church was the loss of the principle of sobornost and the continuity of legitimate ecclesiastical authority, followed by the loss of the Church's inner spiritual freedom.

Two years after the death of Moscow Patriarch Tikhon (Belavin), in 1927, several events occurred that still have serious consequences for the Church in Russia. The first was a church coup organized under the leadership of Evgeny Tuchkov, head of the 6th Department of the OGPU. As a result of this successful special operation, the former Renovationist Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), recruited by the OGPU, was placed at the head of the Church. In his claims to church power, he relied not on the conciliar will of the Church, but on the will of the Soviet punitive bodies (OGPU-NKVD).

Shortly before that, a new legitimate primate of the Russian Church had been elected by a written survey and collection of signatures from the bishops. By a majority of the bishops' votes (72 votes in favor), the lot fell on Metropolitan Kirill (Smirnov) of Kazan. The OGPU quickly tried to intervene and prevent the election of an unwanted hierarch. Most of the

[1] The name of the Soviet major repressive body changed many times over seventy years, with abbreviations VChK, OGPU, NKVD, NKGB, MGB, and KGB, to the present FSB. All these versions are used in the text.

[2] Renovationism, also known as the Living Church, was the schismatic movement in the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1920s sanctioned by the Soviet authorities. For more on it, see Edward Roslof, *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905–1946* (Indiana University Press, 2002).

participants in the secret council vote were arrested and imprisoned in prisons and camps.

One of those arrested in this case was Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), who, unlike other bishops, was very soon released. Having agreed to cooperate with the OGPU, he accepted the proposal, under their control, to establish a new "Provisional Patriarchal Synod" from among the recruited bishops. In this, he exceeded the authority entrusted to him earlier as Locum Tenens and, illegally appropriating the authority of the first hierarch, created a new schism in the Church. The composition of this autocratic body was selected and formed within the OGPU based on the principle of loyalty to the Soviet power and willingness to cooperate with the state security agencies. It is not surprising that immediately after its foundation, it received registration, even though, before that, the "Tikhonovsky" Church administration had been denied registration for many years.

Thus, in 1927, with the intervention of the OGPU, a new church structure was created under the guise of the "old" one, which was under the strict control of repressive bodies. This new structure became known as "Sergian Church" or "Sergianism".

One of the first acts of the Sergian "Provisional Patriarchal Synod" was the proclamation of the so-called "Declaration of Loyalty to Soviet Power" on July 29, 1927. In this document, on behalf of the entire Russian Church, the "joys and sorrows" of the Communist regime were proclaimed as fully shared by the Church. This differed radically from the previous, more restrained statements of Patriarch Tikhon and other bishops. The new Church leadership was declaring a course of action of unconditional loyalty and cooperation with Soviet power. In fact, it was a course of complete subordination of the Church to the Soviet state security organs.

Internal church resistance and the struggle for church freedom

The illegitimate establishment of the "Provisional Patriarchal Synod" by Metropolitan Sergius and his issuance of a Declaration of Loyalty to the Communist regime caused serious confusion among the "Tikhonovsky" Church. Bishops and priests in many dioceses refused to recognize the canonicity of the new "Synod" and its Declaration. Metropolitan Sergius was accused by many prominent hierarchs of violating "*Sobornost*", non-canonical usurpation of Church authority, and voluntary subordination of the Church to the interests of the God-fighting regime.

Similar to the "Confessing Church" movement in Nazi Germany, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, an intra-church opposition movement spontaneously emerged, which received in the literature the conventional name of the "non-commemorators". In a number of regions, entire dioceses headed by bishops declared their non-recognition of Metropolitan Sergius' authority. Among the leaders of the opposition were such prominent hierarchs as Metropolitan Kirill (Smirnov, †1937) of Kazan, Metropolitan Agafangel (Preobrazhensky, †1928) of Yaroslavl, Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovykh, †1937) of Petrograd, Archbishop Seraphim (Samoilovich, †1937) of Uglich, Archbishop Andrew (Ukhtomsky, †1937) of Ufa, and many others. All of them, for their principled position, would later tragically end

their lives in Stalin's prisons and concentration camps.

Calls for the preservation of the Church's inner spiritual freedom and the impossibility of it serving the interests of the atheistic state became the leitmotif of the opposition hierarchs' polemics with Metropolitan Sergius during these years. It was a polemic not so much about the system of political power or order, but about the very nature of the Church, its mission, and purpose. The question was not just about the usual "loyalty" to this or that system of power, but about the identity of interests (shared "joys and sorrows") of the Church and the regime, which aimed at the total violent eradication of religion, faith in God, and the Church itself, and about the inadmissibility of the Church serving these criminal interests. This was the fundamental difference between the Church's loyalty to previous political regimes, which declared their outward commitment or loyalty to Christianity.

But many "non-commemorators" went even beyond mere disagreement with a certain ideology. In the spirit of the course of the Local Council of 1917-1918, which welcomed democratic reforms and the liberation of the Church from the dictates of the state, they insisted on the principle of preserving the internal spiritual freedom of the Church in the face of any state power, be it monarchy, democracy, authoritarianism, or totalitarianism. The line of possible compromise with the state was determined by this very criterion—inner spiritual freedom and independence from any outside influences. This was a new direction in Russian Orthodox theological thought, so uncharacteristic of it in earlier times. The fact that these ideas were publicly expressed by the hierarchs of the Church not in conditions of external freedom, but under the threat of arrest and repression, and often even from places of imprisonment, makes them especially valuable and relevant, including for our time. Unfortunately, this heritage of new martyrs and confessors of the twentieth century has remained virtually unknown and unclaimed in the post-Soviet Church.

By the early 1930s, the intra-church movement of the "non-commemorators" had, to a greater or lesser extent, embraced virtually all dioceses of the Russian Church. In conditions of relative freedom, this intra-church movement would have unquestionably spread and would have influenced the development of the Russian Church, making it quite different from what it is today. But the Soviet repressive organs, in close cooperation with Metropolitan Sergius' "Provisional Synod," did everything to destroy both the movement and its representatives.

Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky).

Metropolitan Sergius subjected dissenting bishops to removal from their pulpits, suspensions from serving, and excommunication (in fact, the same thing that Patriarch Kirill Gundyaev is now doing to the anti-war priests of the Russian Orthodox Church). For the OGPU-NKVD officers, disobedience to the "Provisional Synod" of Metropolitan Sergius and non-recognition of his "Declaration" was sufficient to be accused of involvement in the "anti-Soviet church

underground," resulting in long prison and concentration camp terms (from 10 to 25 years) or executions.

Suppression of the opposition. The emergence of the Catacomb Church

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the first wave of arrests of disobedient hierarchs took place. In 1929 alone, more than fifteen bishops who had separated from Metropolitan Sergius were arrested. The "Provisional Synod" immediately appointed to the vacated pulpits loyal bishops who had been "interviewed" by the OGPU. The Communist regime, with the help of Metropolitan Sergius, carried out a kind of "selection" (purges) among the episcopate and "reset" of the Russian Church. Only those who confirmed their loyalty and agreed to be secret agents of the Soviet secret services were allowed to rule the dioceses.

Metropolitan Joseph (Petrovykh) of the Catacomb Church, 1928.

From March to October 1929, the Chekists[3] carried out the first stage of the national operation to destroy the church opposition: mass arrests took place in many regions of the country. According to incomplete statistics, more than five thousand clergymen were arrested during that year.

Since that time, the opposition of "non-commemorators" received a new unofficial name—the "True Orthodox Church" (TOC). It was under this name that it was "registered" in the investigative files of the OGPU–NKVD.

From July 1931 to April 1932, mass arrests of supporters of the anti-Sergius opposition again swept across all regions of the USSR. The number of arrested clergymen during this period exceeded nineteen thousand.

In conditions of total repression, the remaining representatives of the movement began to move to an illegal form of activity for self-preservation. By the mid-1930s, the remnants of the opposition were driven into the deep underground and lost the ability to influence the masses. This new movement came to be known as the "Catacomb Church." In the materials of NKVD investigative cases, it continued to be referred to as the "True Orthodox Church". Its followers justified the forced withdrawal of the Church to the "catacombs" by the need to preserve its internal freedom and independence from the God-fighting state.

The peak of repressions against this movement fell in 1937-1938, when more than forty bishops and thousands of priests were shot in NKVD custody all over the country on mass fabricated cases of "anti-Soviet underground movement known as the 'True Orthodox Church." The exact numbers have not yet been established.

In addition to the persecution of the followers of the TOC, the Soviet repressive organs, during this period, annihilated the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and a number of other Orthodox and Protestant movements. Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists were also subjected to brutal repression and extermination.
Knowing about such massacres, Metropolitan Sergius and his "Provisional Synod" not only did not stand up for the innocent victims, but also publicly declared to the whole world that there was no religious

[3] A colloquial name for all agents of Soviet and Russian secret services.

repression in the USSR and that bishops and priests were serving just punishment solely for their "political crimes."

However, such statements did not prevent the regime from proceeding to destroy the Sergian group, as well. After the massacre of the anti-Sergian opposition, the same fate awaited the clergy loyal to Soviet power. According to some estimates, by 1940, there were no more than 100 functioning churches in the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Sergius in the Russian Federation. His Declaration not only did not save anyone from persecution, but, on the contrary, served as a reason and cause for increased repression. All religious organizations and clergy were subject to extermination, even those loyal to the Communist regime, such as the "Sergians" and "Renewalists." Only World War II saved them from complete annihilation.

Stalin's "reset" of the Moscow Patriarchate

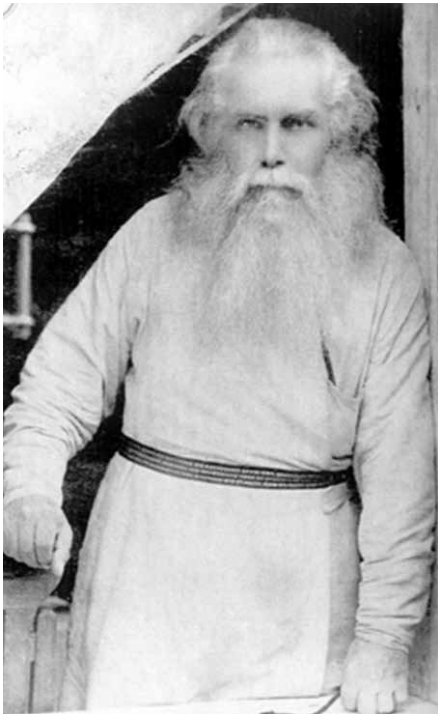
Since 1943, there has been a change in the Stalinist regime's policy toward religion and the church. Having failed in the war with Nazi Germany, Stalin was forced to appeal to the leaders of the USA and Great Britain with a request for military aid and the opening of a second front. Negotiations within the framework of the Tehran Conference of the anti-Hitler coalition, scheduled for November 1943, were vital for Stalin's regime. To succeed, it was necessary to demonstrate to the Western Allies, a readiness for democratic change and the restoration of religious freedom. Therefore, to ensure successful negotiations it was decided to use the influence of religious organizations to create a positive "democratic" image of the USSR.

For this purpose, a delegation of the Church of England was invited to the USSR for the first time. Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) was entrusted to conduct negotiations with the delegation, and for the sake of greater pomp, it was decided to hastily elevate him to the rank of Patriarch.

On the nights of September 4 and 5, 1943, on Stalin's orders, three Sergian bishops who had remained free—Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), himself, as well as, Metropolitan Alexey (Simansky) and Metropolitan Nicholas (Yarushevich)—were brought to him in the Kremlin. At this meeting, Stalin instructed the metropolitans to "reboot" their church organization and to convene a Council of Bishops for this purpose (at which, however, not even fifty percent of the hierarchy of the Russian Church was represented).

The result of this event was the unilateral proclamation of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), as "Patriarch of Moscow." At the same time, at Stalin's personal insistence, the title was changed and instead of "All Russia", as it had been under Patriarch Tikhon, it became "All Rus" (to substantiate Stalin's claims to the heritage of Kyivan Rus). At the meeting, the Synod, which had not functioned since 1934, was re-established. Also, from that moment, the name "Russian Orthodox Church" (ROC) was finally approved for the Sergian structure instead of the name "Orthodox Russian Church" (ORC) used under Patriarch Tikhon.

To control the ROC, on Stalin's orders, a special state body was created under the USSR Council of People's Commissars—the "Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church," (CDROC) which was headed by Colonel G. Karpov, head of the



Metropolitan Kirill (Smirnov) of the Catacomb Church in exile, 1936/7.

5th (Church) Department of the 2nd Directorate of the NKGB of the USSR. The Patriarch and members of the Synod of the ROC had to coordinate all their actions with this supervisory body.

A week after his enthronement, Patriarch Sergius received in Moscow the long-awaited delegation of the Church of England headed by Archbishop Cyril Garbett of York, who afterwards stated in the New York Times and other Western media that "in the Soviet Union there is complete freedom of religion." From that moment on, the Moscow Patriarchate began to be actively involved and used in defending and promoting the interests of the Soviet totalitarian regime internationally. At the same time, recruitment among the clergy and the work of MGB-KGB agents in the structures of the Russian Orthodox Church intensified.

Gradually, the participation of the Moscow Patriarchate in foreign events became one of the priority areas of activity, which was supervised directly by CDROC and the NKGB-MGB of the USSR. On April 4, 1946, a special Department for External Church Relations (DECR) was established within the structure of the ROC MP, whose employees were specially recruited by the MGB-KGB for further agent activity abroad. This department reported directly to the curators from the MGB-KGB and could not actually be influenced even by the Moscow Patriarchs.

A separate, and little-studied topic, is the use by the KGB of its agents in the Russian Orthodox Church for espionage and intelligence activities abroad, participation in various international and ecumenical events, and dissemination and promotion of decisions and narratives necessary for the Soviet regime. This topic still needs to be fully investigated. Unfortunately, this is hindered by the strict secrecy of the KGB archives in Moscow.

Metropolitan Augustin (Petersons), Primate of the Latvian Orthodox Autonomous Church (CP) destroyed by the Soviets in 1944.

Establishment of the "spiritual monopoly" of the ROC MP and destruction of the opposition

It should be noted that since 1946, the Stalinist regime has intensified its campaign for the purposeful destruction of any alternative church jurisdictions and movements and the establishment of a complete monopoly in the USSR of its puppet church structure, the ROC MP. Through brutal repression, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Ukrainian and Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, and the Latvian Orthodox Autonomous Church, under the jurisdiction of the Church of Constantinople, other parishes of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (including in Transcarpathia), as well as dioceses and parishes of the Romanian and Serbian Churches were forcibly liquidated. The Ukrainian Autonomous Church and the Renewal Church in Russia were also liquidated. In addition, the campaign to identify and destroy underground communities of the Catacomb or True Orthodox Church was renewed. Clergy and parishes were forced under pressure from the state security agencies to convert to the ROC MP, and those who disagreed were subjected to arrests and long prison sentences. Thus, in the second half of the 1940s, the complete monopoly of the ROC MP, which was controlled by and loyal to the communist regime, was ensured in the USSR. But even under these conditions, the church opposition in the USSR continued to persist, although driven underground and deprived of the ability to influence the broad masses. Despite the official "liquidation", secret Greek Catholic bishops and priests continued their illegal activities under pain of death. Also, despite the mass repressions against the followers of the TOC, by the early 1960s in the USSR, there were still at least 100 secret priests of this movement and more than one thousand "catacomb" (underground) communities of the TOC. The topic of the history and secret ministry of the Catacomb Church in the USSR remains poorly studied and unrecognized, due to the long-standing taboo on it by the Moscow Patriarchate, which in Soviet times helped to suppress church opposition.

Bishop's Council called by Josef Stalin, 1943. In the center are Metropolitan Alexey (Simansky), Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), and Metropolitan Nikolai (Yarushevich).

In the identification and liquidation of these and other underground church groups, the departments for religious affairs and the KGB in the field were often assisted by priests and bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate, who were recruited as secret agents of state security. At the same time, with the emergence of dissident movements in the USSR, the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate continued to suppress any opposition within its structure. In 1965, Archbishop Germogenes (Golubev), who refused to close churches in his diocese, at the insistence of Archbishop Alexey Ridiger (KGB agent "Drozdov"), head of the Moscow Patriarchate, was removed from the diocese and placed under house arrest in the Zhirovichi Monastery. Priests Gleb Yakunin and Nikolai Eshliman,

Metropolitan Alexey (Simansky), 1953.

who spoke out against the violation of the rights of believers in the USSR, were suspended from the priesthood. Many other lesser-known priests of the Russian Orthodox Church who dared to express disagreement with the official course of the church leadership were also subjected to ecclesiastical punishments.

A sad page in the history of the ROC during this period was the campaign to close existing parishes. Of the 14,477 patriarchal churches operating in the USSR in 1949, by 1966 only 7,523 remained open. Accordingly, by 1966, more than seven thousand clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church were deprived of parishes, registration, and means of subsistence. Notably, the closure of churches was now carried out not by the Soviet authorities, but by the hands of the ruling bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate, who obediently closed these churches by order from the departments for religious affairs. And priests who dared to protest such actions of the episcopate were subjected to ecclesiastical punishments.

The "New Type" of Soviet Clergy

The leadership of the Council for Religious Affairs proudly stated in their reports that as a result of many years of preventive measures, the Soviet authorities managed to breed and form in the ROC a "new type" of Soviet clergy, which simultaneously believed "in God and in communism" and "in word and deed confirm not only loyalty, but also patriotism to socialist society."[4] This was a type of unprincipled opportunist and careerist, very often self-serving and morally corrupt. Such people were easy for KGB officers to control by blackmailing them. Therefore, with the assistance of the Soviet security services, they quickly made a career in the church, occupying leading positions in the hierarchy.

As the deputy chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs Furov noted in his report in 1979, "We have developed a clear and broad system of educating the episcopate, and through it the rank and file clergy, in political terms, forming in them patriotism, civic duty, respect for the laws and activities of the Soviet government." At the same time, as he specifies, "no ordination to the episcopate, no transfer of bishops, passes without a thorough examination of the candidates by the responsible staff of the Council in close connection with the commissioners, local bodies, and relevant concerned organizations,"[5] such as, the KGB.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in the late 1980s and early 1990s the Soviet hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate opposed democratic transformations in society in every possible way, actively opposing the collapse of the USSR, the processes of national revival and the acquisition of state independence by the

[4] В. Фуров, «*Из* отчета совета по делам религии—членам ЦК КПСС,» *Le Messager, Вестник Русского Христианского Движения* 130, 1979, 275.

[5] Ibid.

Republics, as well as the restoration of the Ukrainian and Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, and the Latvian Orthodox Autonomous Church under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Bessarabian Metropolis of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Moldova, the Russian True Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Free Church under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), and other alternative jurisdictions.

According to the former Exarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko), no bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church during the Soviet era could be appointed to a cathedral without the consent of the KGB. Partially declassified in 1991–1992, the archives of the KGB of the USSR testified that most of the prominent hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate were secret agents or employees of the KGB. Their active international activities in the ecumenical and peacemaking fields were supervised directly by the KGB.

Among the declassified secret employees of the KGB are the agent "Svyatoslav"—Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad, agent "Drozdov"—Metropolitan of Leningrad and later Patriarch of Moscow, Alexey (Ridiger), agent "Mikhailov"—Metropolitan of Kaliningrad, and the current Patriarch of Moscow Kirill (Gundyaev), and dozens of other names of prominent hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church.
None of them ever repented for their years of cooperation with the KGB. The lustration that many hoped for in the 1990s never took place in the ROC. Remaining in the leadership of the ROC, these "agents in cassocks" continued to defend the interests of the Russian security services with the help of the Church even after the collapse of the USSR. This intensified when former KGB lieutenant colonel Vladimir Putin came to power in the Russian Federation, and many leading positions in the state were occupied by former KGB officers. It is not surprising, then, that the longtime KGB agent "Mikhailov" (aka, Kirill Gundyaev) became the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, and one of the main adherents and ideologues of the new Chekist regime of the Russian Federation, justifying and blessing all of its crimes on behalf of the Church.

Secretary General of the Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev, Metropolitan Alexey (Ridiger) (future Patriarch Alexey II), and Patriarch Pimen are toasting the 60th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, 1977.

Paradoxically, with the fall of the Communist regime, the ROC MP not only failed to free itself from the captivity of the Soviet security services, but to a certain extent, became the vanguard of their return to power and neo-Soviet restoration in the Russian Federation. If in 1927, Metropolitan Sergey (Stragorodsky) and other hierarchs from his group cooperated with the OGPU out of fear for their lives, in the 2000s Patriarch of Moscow Kirill Gundyaev voluntarily put the ROC

Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev) with President Vladimir Putin, Unity Day, 2016. Source: www. kremlin.ru.

in the service of the Chekist junta, turning the Church into an ideological and propaganda mouthpiece of the totalitarian regime of the Russian Federation. The ROC MP, in the person of its Patriarch and other hierarchs, became a conductor of anti-Gospel, quasi-religious, and fundamentalist ideas of the "Russian World". For many years, they have been developing and propagating these ideas among the Russian society and the power elite to establish them as the official state ideology, thus laying the foundation for the Russian Federation's territorial claims and wars of conquest to Ukraine and to the former territories of the USSR and the Russian Empire.

Thinking about this, I would like to refer once again to the Gospel words of Christ: "Can a good tree bear bad fruit, and a bad tree bear good fruit?" (Mt. 7:18). We need an honest and broad discussion on this issue to understand the real reasons for the current sickness and crisis of the ROC MP.

Is it possible, based on the old system of the Moscow Patriarchate, to revive a full-fledged, healthy spiritual life without all the ugly and diseased manifestations that we see in it now? Or does it need to be completely dismantled and rebooted, together with the repressive KGB-FSB system that gave birth to it? We find the answer to this question in the same Gospel of Matthew: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt 7:19). "And no one shall put a patch of unbleached cloth to a dilapidated garment, for the newly sewn one will separate from the old one, and the hole will be worse. Neither shall they pour young wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine flows out, and the wineskins are lost; but young wine shall be poured into new wineskins, and both shall be saved (Mt 9:16-17). ✠

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